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Supplementary Language Arts Centers in Danbury.

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This bulletin, the fourth in a series, describes the Demonstration City Project in Danbury, Connecticut, a model school system designed to research and develop federally-funded programs in close cooperation with educational consultants. Central to the project's goal of turning potential into accomplishment and bringing children up to grade level, was the idea that language arts is more than reading alone. Speaking, writing, and listening skills were included in the planned curriculum. A description is furnished of the criteria by which the children, schools, schedule, curriculum, and staff were selected. Teacher impressions and ideas resulting from the project are listed. (JB)

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A Demonstration City Project Report . . .

Supplementary Language Arts Centers in Danbury



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Supplementary Language Arts Centers in Danbury

"Sometimes it's discouraging—their slow progress in reading. You try everything and nothing seems to work. Then you stumble on something. And it works! Then it works again and again."

—Carol Woodworth, Language Arts Specialist
Danbury Public Schools

Connecticut State Department of Education
Hartford, Connecticut 06115
January, 1968

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1 Demonstration City

WITH THE DRAMATIC INCREASE in the availability of state and federal funds for education that came about in 1965, school administrators began raising new and thoughtful questions:

- ◆ What were the most efficient ways of planning and administering a variety of programs that could be funded from a variety of sources?
- ◆ How could Connecticut towns best take full advantage of the new financial aid?
- ◆ How could fragmentation of effort and dissipation of funds be avoided?

From such questions emerged Demonstration City, a model school system where needed, federally-funded programs would be researched, developed, and conducted in close cooperation with education department consultants.

"The major purpose of the project," says Dr. Harold J. Mahoney, the state's director of instructional services, "is to demonstrate how a community can use all existing federal acts to improve its educational program. The effort is distinctly educational. We hope to demonstrate how improved *educational* opportunities can raise economic levels. Hopefully, other towns will want to follow suit with similar programs."

Danbury, Connecticut—a community of 45,000 people representing all economic and cultural strata—was selected as the model city. It has since created and continued a number of different innovative education projects, each of which attempts to deal with one or another of the serious problems that confront today's urban schools. All of the Demonstration City projects are funded by a com-

bination of federal, state, and local funds; all of them concentrate on the education needs of the socially, culturally, and economically disadvantaged segment of the community.

To help other communities inaugurate similar programs, the Office of Program Development of the Connecticut State Department of Education is publishing a series of bulletins devoted to the Danbury Demonstration City Projects. This is the fourth bulletin in the series. Those already published or soon to be available from the Department of Education are *Preschool Education in Danbury*, *Vocational Education in Danbury*, and *Elementary School Guidance in Danbury*.



2

Language Skills

and the Disadvantaged

It's A BRIGHT Monday morning. Seven youngsters are learning to read in a mobile van parked close to the Roberts Avenue Elementary School in Danbury.

The trailer is attractively decorated—pleasant green walls and an inexpensive green rug. There is ample room for essential equipment, including desks for teacher and pupils, two file cabinets, a portable bulletin board, shelves and storage space for books, tapes, exercise manuals, basal series, testing gear and mechanical aids.

Eleven-year-old Jimmy is working intently with a stack of index cards and the Language Master, an ingenious teaching machine developed by Bell & Howell. Imagine—file cards that talk!

Jimmy looks at the word printed on the first file card: *Like*. Jimmy pauses. Then, deliberately, he says: "*Like*. Yeah, that's *Like*."

Then he inserts the card in the machine, which plays back a strip of magnetic tape as the card passes through a tape recorder mechanism. "*Like*," says the machine. "*Like*." The Language Master's "voice" is that of teacher Edward Moore, who arranged the cards earlier.

"*Like*," Jimmy says again. He smiles. He didn't know that word yesterday. Today he does. He takes the *Like* card from the machine and puts it in the big pile of words he has mastered. Then he looks at the next card: *Did*.

"*Dad*," says Jimmy.

"*Did*," says the machine.

"Mmm. *Did*. *Did*," says Jimmy. The *Did* card goes into the smaller pile of words he'll try again tomorrow. When there are no more cards in the small pile, Jimmy will have increased his basic reading vocabulary by 250 words.

WORDS ARE THE BUILDING BLOCKS of civilization. An adult who cannot read, write, or speak clearly is destined to fail. And it's common knowledge, particularly among educators, that the children of poverty are too often certain to do badly in school because of inadequate language skills.

That's why, thanks to the dramatic impetus of government support in recent years, educators are developing highly promising, innovative programs in teaching language mastery to the disadvantaged. There's a new spirit of ferment, of willingness to experiment, in the classroom. More than that, there's confidence that education can help break the cycle of poverty crippling individuals, families, whole neighborhoods and cities, and the American dream of equal opportunity for all.

Educators have known for years that the disadvantaged child is, in effect, "behind" the middle class youngster both in learning and readiness to learn before he even reaches the schoolhouse door. In many cases, his parents have not been able to read to him, or taken him to a circus or zoo, or nurtured his curiosity about places and things, or mastered the language themselves.

In poor families, survival has to be a 24-hour-a-day job.

Trying to keep up in school is a tough, frustrating chore for the child. And if the attitude at home is indifferent toward school, the deprived child is doubly doomed to fail. *What's the use?* And so he falls further and further behind, as research in slum schools amply demonstrates. In high school, the drop-out route looks inviting.

The word for this pattern is waste—human waste.

Can the pattern be broken? Experiments like Danbury's are striving for a "yes" answer.

The goals: motivate youngsters to learn; make the learning as exciting, rewarding, and effective as possible. Danbury educators want to turn *potential* into *accomplishment*.



Individual attention from a friendly teacher, with lessons tailored to the youngster's particular learning difficulties, often results in dramatic progress.



Teacher aides, like the one above giving special help to a child, are important members of Danbury's language arts team.

3

How Danbury's Program Works

IN A BRIGHTLY LIT, gaily decorated classroom at the Mill Ridge School, teacher Carol Woodworth has just finished reading the Cinderella story to four youngsters. Two are white; two are Negro. The youngsters are telling the story back to her in their own words.

"And this here Cinderella, she has to do all the house-work," says little Bertha. She had been all smiles a bit earlier because Cinderella's ball gown was pink, the same color she is wearing today. "Her mother," she continues, "she don't do no work at all."

"Neither do the stepsisters," says Johnny, whose correct speech belies the fact that he reads three years below his grade level.

Elsewhere in the room, three children are using flash cards to match pictures with consonant blends: *sk* goes with pictures of a *skate* and a *skirt*; *pl* belongs to *plane*, *plate*, *pliers*.

In the corner, a teacher's aide is showing Billy how to tell a story into a tape recorder. She'll play it back to him when he's through.

Back at the story-book table, excitement is mounting. "So the fairy just waved her stick," says the well-spoken Johnny, "and the rags turned into a beautiful dress!"

Bertha has a correction. "A beautiful *pink* dress," she says.

DANBURY'S ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS initiated a summer remedial reading program in 1965. The youngsters benefited, to be sure. But reading is just one part of the language-learning quadrangle that also includes *speaking*, *writing*, and *listening*. Modern educators are convinced that a many-sided, saturation approach is the key to teaching the language-handicapped child. And that means

The language arts of reading, writing, speech, and listening, provide the foundation for all future learning. If a child is having language learning difficulties of any kind early in his school career, he needs help—lots of help before he experiences and becomes discouraged by repeated failures. For many Danbury youngsters, the Language Arts Center is the place where they can learn the deep satisfactions of success.





using a variety of aids and methods to help children learn to read, speak, write, and listen better.

Therefore, in the fall of 1965, Ethel Schmidt* and a group of colleagues began outlining a more ambitious program, to begin in the spring of 1966. They and their consultant proposed that Danbury establish language arts education centers for the disadvantaged. The centers would be staffed by specialists and would function year-round, supplementing but not supplanting classroom work. They would serve slow-learning elementary school children, junior high schoolers and parochial school youngsters. And they would be equipped with the modern devices and aids that promised to make schoolwork more exciting and productive for youngsters.

The ultimate aim: to bring each slow learner near or up to grade level in language skills, estimated to be appropriate for him. A tough job, but an exciting one.

With their goal firmly established, these educators set to work on the details—determining the areas of greatest need for such a program in Danbury, organizing a curriculum and a day-to-day schedule, considering evaluation techniques, drafting a proposal to the State Board of Education for ESEA Title I funds.

This is what they found out, and what they did in Danbury when the project was approved.

◆ **The Neediest Schools.** Using three objective measures**, the experts decided that five Danbury elementary schools were serving a high proportion of economically deprived children—Hayestown, Mill Ridge, Morris Street, Roberts Avenue, and South Street. Each school, then, would have a Language Arts Center.

*Miss Schmidt was at that time the language coordinator for the Danbury schools. She is now with RESCUE, the Regional Educational Services Concept Through United Effort which serves 18 area communities.

**The number of children in each school from families receiving State Aid to Dependent Children; percentage of free lunches served in each school; number of children from disadvantaged minority groups in each school.

◆ **The Neediest Youngsters.** After careful evaluation, Child Development Specialists* in cooperation with school principals and classroom teachers selected the children to be helped by the program. To qualify, the youngsters would have to be behind in school, as measured by reading tests and classroom performance, and from disadvantaged homes in one of the areas served by the five Language Arts Centers.

Local educators at this time began to see the size of the job ahead of them. There were well over 400 Danbury youngsters (including junior high school and parochial school students) who needed supplementary language arts work. And reading tests for 102 of these showed that Danbury's disadvantaged, like poor children everywhere, were losing more and more ground in each grade at school. Who could doubt that a daring new program was needed?

◆ **Schedule and Curriculum.** As it evolved in practice, the Centers are open for the business of learning from 8:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m., five days a week. Somewhat shorter hours prevail in summer for youngsters who volunteer for extra work.

During the school day, pupils leave their classes for small-group or individual instruction at the Centers. Each period runs 75 minutes. Some groups meet daily; the less handicapped meet twice a week. A total of 494 youngsters participated during the 1966-67 school year.

The heart of the program, naturally, is intensive work in reading, writing, and speaking. The teachers are free to experiment with an astounding collection of imaginative aids and devices—the Language Master, dialogue tapes and earphones, tactile alphabets, film strips, overhead projectors. The Center libraries have a little bit of everything, from storybooks to a group of magazine photographs with humorous captions.

*For a full description of the role of the Child Development Specialist, see another pamphlet in this series, *Elementary School Guidance in Danbury*, available from the State Department of Education.

◆ **Staff.** Under the direction of Ethel Schmidt, the following specialists and supplemental workers were recruited for the program:

- ✓ 5 language arts specialists—Carol Woodworth, Edward Moore, Luellen Peck, Janet Job, and Sue Megas. These are the teachers, the creators, and day-to-day leaders of the program.
- ✓ 15 classroom teachers who volunteered to staff the afternoon and evening programs.
- ✓ 10 nonprofessional teacher aides.

◆ **Budget.** The creators of the program carefully prepared a budget to cover the spring and summer of 1966, and the 1966-67 school year. The total price of the package was \$204,320.60, paid with federal, state, and local funds.



4

What the Teachers Have Learned

AT HOME, JOSE'S FAMILY speaks Spanish. At school, he is reading English hesitantly from a beautifully illustrated reader.

"Mom had . . . a . . . drub . . ."

"That's almost right," says the teacher. "But look at it again, Jose."

Jose frowns and tries that tricky word again.

"Drab?," he asks.

"Yes! You've got it right!"

Jose repeats: "Mom had a . . . *drab* . . . tan hat."

Impulsively, Jose's teacher hugs him. "What a reader you are!" she exclaims. Jose flashes a huge grin. Yes, it's quite an accomplishment. A year ago, Jose couldn't read a word. He tested out at 68 I.Q. His rapid progress in reading in just a few weeks' time indicates that the test was wrong. Jose's intelligence is at least average, and quite possibly above average.

"He had a horrible early childhood," says the teacher in private. "He was neglected terribly. Now he's 10, and you can see how he's coming along. That's what's so exciting about this program. Working with small groups as we do, and on a fairly intensive schedule, we're able to find out what each child's real needs are . . . Then we can get to work and help."

IN LANGUAGE ARTS PROGRAMS like Danbury's, teachers are learning more and more about their profession, about the subtleties of teaching youngsters who may have little support at home for their success in school, and may have even less confidence in themselves.

"I've grown a hundred times more patient with children," says one language specialist in Danbury. The comment, and the feeling, is typical.

On a tour of Danbury's Language Arts Centers, a visitor

is immediately aware of the dedication, the imagination of the teachers, and the support they are giving slow learners to help them want to do well in school.

Here are some random impressions, and the truths about teaching they seem to point to.

◆ **The Importance of Praise.** "Maurine does very well. She's doing much better today." A compliment, well deserved does wonders. Danbury teachers stress rewards for good work. They "arrange things" so each pupil gets 100 on a test now and then. At all times: encouragement, support.

◆ **Pleasant Environment for Learning.** All sorts of nice things are scattered about the classrooms. In the mobile van, for example, this silly, delightful little verse is posted:

*So here we are in April, in showy, blowy April
In frowzy, blowy April, the rowdy, dowdy time,
In soppy, sloppy April, in wheezy, breezy April,
In ringing, stinging April, with a singing, swinging
rhyme.*

Danbury's language arts specialists are not forgetting it's fun to read, that reading is adventure and discovery, that words can tease and please.

In the mobile van, teacher Edward Moore posted pictures of funny buildings his pupils had drawn, then confronted them with this poem in big block letters:

*Buildings are a great surprise
Every one's a different size
Offices
Grow
Long
And
High,
Tall
Enough
To
Touch
The
Sky.
Houses seem
More Like a box,*



One night I wanted to sleep outside. Of course, we only have a small front yard.

Dunbury's language arts specialists do not forget that it's fun to read and that words and pictures can tease and please. Here is one of the "home-made" posters that delight the pupils who visit teacher Edward Moore's mobile language arts van.

*Made of glue
And Building blocks.
Every time you look, you see
Buildings shaped quite differently.*

◆ **Fine Reading Materials.** There's a new sense of delight, too, in modern reading materials—not to mention mechanical aids like the Language Master, which might have been invented by a wizard who happens to love children. In books now available for the primary school classroom, there's more adventure, less drab Dick and Jane stuff.

This humorous bit of nonsense is from *Let's Read*, a reader put out by Barnhart and used in Danbury.

*Can a pup run?
Can a pup sit up?
Can a pup lap up jam?
A pup can. Wag did.*

In Danbury, they also used Mcmillan's Bank Street readers such as *Around the City*. This is a primer, but the book looks "mature" and inviting to youngsters. And there is lively and realistic art work of city children of all races.

◆ **Imaginative Learning Activities.** One Danbury class made an instant book. At the beginning of the class period, the children orally reconstructed a story, after much discussion as to how it should go. As they spoke, the teacher wrote the youngsters' words down on a transparency, then flashed the developing story on the wall with an overhead projector. Meanwhile, a teacher's aide drew pictures to illustrate the text. Before the class was over, the aide ran off stencil masters of the complete story (with pictures) and returned with a stapled booklet for the kids to take home. Thus, a book was created right before the eyes of the pupils—a book to be proud of, co-authored by every child in the class.

It's an unorthodox lesson, but it works. And the rule is: if it works, keep it. From experimental programs such as Danbury's will come the common classroom practices of tomorrow—and a bunch of youngsters who have learned to have fun with words.

5

A Year of Encouraging Progress

"MR. MOORE! MR. MOORE! I'm *finished*."

It's Jimmy again. He has just taken the last file card out of the Language Master. The pile of words he knows, with "*Like*" at the top, is large. Then there's that smaller stack with "*Did*" on top.

"Why, Jimmy, old bean," says Edward Moore. "You know all those words! Wow! What a reader we've got! Are these the words you don't know? Do you want to write the words you don't know?"

"Sure."

"Good. Jimmy, you're doing *great*."

Again, there's that giant smile. And more to himself than to anyone, Jimmy says, "Yeah, great!"

AT THE END of the 1966-67 school year, Danbury educators completed a formal evaluation report of their language arts program for the State Board of Education. No miracles were reported—just significant pupil progress in reading, speaking, and behavior.

"The whole project was successful," said the report. "Teachers and aides worked well together and both worked to the advantage of the children. Interest and creativity were demonstrated by both groups."

Testing and progress reports are a day-to-day business at the Language Arts Centers. At the end of the school year, Danbury had these generally encouraging results to report.

◆ **Reading.** A total of 170 pupils showed an average gain of nine months on the word recognition portion of the Spache Test. Another 105 gained 7½ months in vocabulary and eight and 4/10 months in comprehension on the Gates McGinitie Test. In addition, libraries in the five elementary schools with Language Arts Centers re-

ported an 18% increase in circulation of books, while five Danbury schools without Centers showed an 8% decrease.

◆ **Speaking.** Taped samples of 30 pupil conversations with teachers showed an average increase of 2.1 phonological units,* but an increase in language mazes of ½ per child. Another 73 youngsters gained an average of 3.74 I.Q. points on the Peabody Vocabulary Test.

◆ **Listening.** Teachers reported that of 203 children evaluated, 103 (51%) showed improved listening skill, as measured by contributions to small-group discussions and attentiveness in class; 89 pupils (44%) stayed about the same; 11 (5%) declined in listening skills.

◆ **Self-Image.** Using a simple scale for subjective evaluations of each pupil's progress, teachers indicated that 143 youngsters (70%) improved in academic work, 81 (40%) in class behavior, and 62 (31%) in playground behavior. The remaining pupils stayed about the same or deteriorated.

It's an honest report that shows some progress but not nearly enough. Danbury educators would be the first to admit that they are just beginning to understand the techniques of teaching language skills and that realization of their goal—grade-level accomplishment for every disadvantaged child—will take years of research and piecemeal trial-and-error progress in the classroom.

That attitude is reflected in these words of Edward A. Sillari, Danbury's Superintendent of Schools:

We have made progress, but a great deal remains to be done. We must continue to recognize the needs of a changing world. And this imposes a responsibility to discard that which is no longer useful, to revise and up-

*A phonological unit is a group of words preceded by a pause in the subject's voice following a definite drop in vocal pitch; in other words, it is a measure of hesitation in speaking. A maze is a tangle of language that makes no sense semantically.

date programs which remain meaningful, to add new programs to meet the needs of a diverse school population.

Our direction is clear: To provide optimum opportunity for each person in relation to his individual and unique abilities. The Schools exist as part of a complex society which is in a constant state of rapid change. This fact must be recognized, and the potential impact of change must be a matter of constant concern. We must continue to find better ways. ■



